

A Focused Inquiry into Algerian Students' Voices on English as a Medium of Instruction Adoption in Higher Education

Une enquête approfondie sur les voix des étudiants algériens concernant l'adoption de l'anglais comme langue d'enseignement dans l'enseignement supérieur

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Abstract:

This paper examines Algerian university students' perceptions of the recent adoption of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in higher education. Data were collected through a short survey combining a main open-ended question, designed to gather rich qualitative insights into students' opinions, concerns, and recommendations regarding EMI implementation, and a supporting closed-ended question to quantify their language-of-instruction preferences. Thematic analysis revealed six key themes: EMI's global benefits, language attitudes and motivation, linguistic and pedagogical challenges, the political dimension of EMI, identity-related concerns, and students suggested solutions. Quantitative results show English is the most preferred language, followed by Arabic, then a bilingual preference of both. The consistency between both data sets reinforces the validity and reliability of the findings. The results highlight the importance of an inclusive policy approach that values and involves students' voices in promoting a planned, gradual, and well-supported transition to EMI in Algerian higher education.

Keywords: English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) – Algerian higher education – Students' perceptions – Language policy – Thematic analysis

Résumé :

Cet article examine les perceptions des étudiants universitaires algériens concernant l'adoption récente de l'anglais comme langue d'enseignement dans l'enseignement supérieur. Les données ont été recueillies au moyen d'un court questionnaire combinant une question principale ouverte, visant à recueillir des données qualitatives approfondies sur les opinions, préoccupations et recommandations des étudiants, et une question fermée destinée à quantifier leurs préférences linguistiques. L'analyse thématique a révélé six thèmes clés : les avantages mondiaux de l'EMI, les attitudes linguistiques et la motivation, les défis pédagogiques, la dimension politique de l'EMI, les préoccupations identitaires et les solutions proposées par les étudiants. Les résultats quantitatifs ont montré une préférence majoritaire pour l'anglais, suivie de l'arabe, puis du bilinguisme. La cohérence entre les données qualitatives et quantitatives renforce la validité des résultats. L'étude souligne l'importance d'une approche inclusive qui intègre la voix des étudiants dans la mise en œuvre progressive et soutenue de l'EMI en Algérie.

Mots- clés : L'anglais comme langue d'enseignement – Enseignement supérieur algérien – Perceptions des étudiants – Politique linguistique – Analyse thématique

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Introduction

In today's globalized world, there appears to be a rapid global trend, particularly in non-Anglophone countries, where English is transitioning from being taught as a foreign language (EFL) to becoming the medium of instruction (hereafter EMI) for academic disciplines like science, mathematics, geography, and medicine (Wachter and Maiworm, 2014; Kirkpatrick, 2016; Deveci, Ayish, and Midraj, 2023; Ali, 2021; Mouhanna, 2016; and Mustafawi and Shaaban, 2019). The concept of English as a Medium of Instruction has varying definitions depending on the context. This variability is likely due to the relatively recent emergence of EMI as a field of study, as noted by Macaro (2018). For the purposes of this research, the adopted definition aligns with Macaro, Curle, Pun, An, and Dearden (2018) suggestion. They define EMI as "The use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English" (Macaro et al., 2018, p. 37). The primary factor often cited in academic literature as driving this global movement toward EMI is the internationalization and globalization of higher education. These processes aim to prepare graduates with a global mindset to compete effectively in the international job market. Consequently, the demands of this era have prompted countries to develop distinct language policies—particularly within higher education settings—to integrate into the global academic community.

Algeria is no exception to the global trend of adopting English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). Recently, the Algerian government announced a significant policy shift through a ministerial decree issued in June 2022, mandating the adoption of English as the primary language of instruction in universities starting in September 2022 (Ghouali and Haddam Bouabdallah, 2024). Moving away from the traditional use of French in higher education toward English is not merely a shift in language preference but a strategic effort to align with global academic and professional standards. In a multilingual society like Algeria, the transition to EMI may face diverse challenges due to the variations in students' linguistic proficiencies and cultural identities.

This research investigates how Algerian university students perceive this policy shift and aims to explore their opinions, attitudes, and suggestions regarding the implementation of EMI in higher education. Accordingly, it seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- Investigating Algerian students' opinions and attitudes toward EMI.
- Identifying the challenges and concerns students express in relation to EMI implementation.
- Exploring students' suggestions and recommendations to ensure a successful and effective adoption of EMI.

The article begins by providing a general overview of EMI within global and regional contexts. It then transitions to the Algerian sociolinguistic and policy context, followed by a review of relevant literature on students' perspectives regarding EMI. Subsequently, the article

explains the methodology, presents and discusses the findings, and concludes with implications and recommendations for future EMI policy and practice in Algeria.

1. EMI in Global and Regional Contexts

The adoption of EMI is one of the most important linguistic shifts of the 21st century, especially since non-anglophone countries seek to make their educational practices align with global standards. The rationale for EMI is the need to prepare students to participate in a globalized economy where English is the lingua franca (Dearden, 2014; Piller and Cho, 2013). Generally, EMI has always been presented as a tool for academic inclusion that gives students access to the global academic community and facilitates their engagement in international research, conferences, and academic exchanges (Dearden, 2014). However, though EMI implementation fosters global academic inclusion, it faces a number of challenges on the local scale.

Given the global status of English as a lingua franca and the global shift towards EMI, several studies worldwide addressed this topic. As stated by Dearden (2014), this trend of EMI adoption is informed with the intention to internationalize education; however, its implementation has elicited mixed outcomes with varying levels of success and challenges across different contexts.

1.1. European Context

Wachter and Maiworm (2014) focused on European higher education and stressed the rapid spread of EMI programs in countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. According to Wachter and Maiworm, this spread was a response from these countries to globalization and the increasing demand for English-speaking professionals. Another study by Soler-Carbonell, Saarinen, and Kibbermann (2017) investigating EMI implementation in Estonia stated that the main goals for this shift were to attract international students and integrate local institutions into the European higher education area. Their study revealed that students find EMI beneficial for their career development, but also find difficulties balancing the dual challenges of language learning and subject matter learning.

1.2. Asian Context

The study conducted by Kirkpatrick (2016) focuses on Asian countries such as China, Japan, and Malaysia. According to Kirkpatrick (2016), the adoption of EMI in China was with the aim of internationalizing universities and elevating their global rankings; however, his findings demonstrated that many students and teachers struggle with the linguistic demands of teaching and learning in English, often at the expense of comprehension.

Similarly, in South Korea, Byun et al. (2011) highlighted EMI use's impact on students' stress, which led them to rely on strategies such as rote learning_ the process of memorizing information based on repetition_ to overcome language barriers.

1.3. American and African Context

In Latin American countries like Colombia and Chile, Fortanet-Gomez (2013) stated that EMI adoption often faces resistance from both students and educators who perceive EMI as a threat to cultural and linguistic identity. Additionally, in African countries like Rwanda, EMI introduction in secondary and tertiary education encountered challenges related to teachers' training and the availability of English language materials (Coleman, 2015).

1.4. MENA Region Context

The increasing globalization of higher education and the desire for greater academic engagement on a global scale has led the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region countries to adopt EMI (Ayish, 2020). Similar to previously mentioned contexts, EMI in MENA region also encountered challenges in its way of seeking global academic inclusivity. Studies by Deveci, Ayish, and Midraj (2023); Ali (2021); Mouhanna (2016); and Mustafawi and Shaaban (2019) presented the case of EMI in the Arab Gulf highlighting its positive results on global academic inclusivity as well as its negative effect on students' academic achievements.

In contrast, in his study, Ntombela (2023) critically examined the adoption EMI in the MENA region, arguing that it resembles linguistic conquest rather than a pedagogical solution. He highlighted its detrimental impact on students who would benefit more from learning in their native languages. Ntombela further contended that the perception of English as the primary language of knowledge underpins EMI adoption, fostering a misconception that fields such as education, technology, and science are only valid when expressed in English. This conflation of epistemology with ontology equates knowing English with possessing knowledge, rather than recognizing it as one of many ways to access knowledge. He emphasized that concepts in these fields can be equally understood in languages like Arabic, and teaching them in a language familiar to students enhances comprehension and learning outcomes. Otherwise, the use of EMI risks hindering students' access to knowledge.

These varying findings highlight the dual-edged nature of EMI adoption. Across the previously mentioned studies, it is widely recognized that EMI can open doors to international opportunities. Still, its implementation must be carefully managed to address linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical challenges. In summary, scholars stressed that policymakers must balance the benefits of internationalization with the need to support students against the challenges of learning in a second language. Eventually, these experiences worldwide provide valuable insights for Algeria, which is still in the first steps of adopting EMI in higher education institutions.

2. EMI in the Algerian Context

Historically, the French controlled Algeria's educational system as a colonial legacy meant to eradicate Algerians' linguistic and cultural identity. French was used for intellectual conversation, administration, and instruction during the French occupation. The goal of the 1960s and 1970s Arabisation program was to retain cultural and linguistic identity by Arabizing the educational system after independence, although the transition was not entirely effective (Benrabeh, 2007).

Building on this historical background, the shift towards EMI in Algeria has recently emerged as a sociopolitical strategy to address these longstanding linguistic imbalances. Boukous (2001) describes this as a pursuit of linguistic autonomy_ the capacity of individuals, communities, or nations to independently decide on the use, development, and preservation of their languages without external interference. In this context, English, perceived as a neutral global lingua franca, presents a viable alternative for Algeria to dismantle colonial language hierarchies and align with global academic standards.

This political momentum has been strongly supported at the ministerial level. Tayeb Bouzid, Algeria's former Higher Education and Scientific Research Minister, strongly argued

that the promotion of English in higher education was necessary to overcome the limitations imposed by reliance on French, which had hindered Algerian scholars' ability to engage internationally, participate in conferences, publish in prestigious journals, and improve the ranking and competitiveness of Algerian institutions. In 2019, he openly advocated for English as the primary language of teaching and administration in universities, emphasizing the urgency of reducing reliance on French and aligning with international academic standards (Ghanmi, 2019). His successor, the current minister Kamel Beddari, has built on these initiatives by expanding EMI implementation. He has encouraged universities, particularly those in STEM disciplines, to adopt English and has introduced programs aimed at raising educators' English proficiency levels to B2 or C1. These ministerial efforts reflect the government's broader ambition to position Algeria more effectively within the global academic community (Belmihoub, 2018).

Beyond the political sphere, societal dynamics also shape the reception of EMI. According to Ghanmi (2019), despite the dominance of French among the older elite and urban centers, younger generations increasingly aspire to learn English, viewing it as a gateway to global opportunities, particularly in science, technology, and business.

The adoption of EMI in Algeria is therefore regarded not only as an educational reform but also as a sociopolitical strategy to redefine Algeria's linguistic identity at a global scale (Belmihoub, 2018). This reform has largely been welcomed by Algerian students (Saidani and Afkir, 2023; Chaoua, 2023; Benassou and Bourenane, 2022)

Nevertheless, implementing EMI encounters challenges. Khenioui and Boulkroun (2022) argue that "the sudden shift to English without sufficient preparatory measures risks exacerbating the educational gap, particularly for students with limited prior exposure to the language" (p. 45). This lack of English proficiency among students or even teachers will hinder understanding of academic contexts and delivering effective instructions, eventually hindering this policy's goals.

Another major challenge for EMI implementation in Algeria is the shortage of resources. Hamane (2023) argues that the lack of English resources, including language textbooks, teaching materials, and training programs for educators, creates disparities among institutions. This shortage adds difficulties for both educators and students in adapting to this shift.

The perspectives of students further reflect social conflicts and implementation issues. Numerous studies indicate that students welcome EMI adoption believing it will provide opportunities to integrate into the global market. According to studies by Guenaoui (2024), Bouzeraa and Aziz (2024), and Zereg and Labdadla (2024), students highlighted how EMI will improve access to scientific material, promote academic mobility, and boost employability in global settings. These optimistic views, however, frequently mix with realistic worries about learning objectives and language competency. Guenaoui (2024) reports that linguistic difficulties hinder many students from understanding lectures, participating in discussions, or completing assignments effectively. Similarly, Kherbache and Bellaghma (2024) found that while students recognize the benefits of EMI, they emphasize the need for support systems to overcome language barriers. These findings underscore the duality of student perspectives: optimism about EMI's potential benefits paired with realistic concerns about its practical challenges

To sum up, adopting EMI has historical, political, and societal dimensions featuring Algeria's ambition to engage effectively in the globalized world. Therefore, policymakers must address the challenges posed by these different dimensions to ensure the EMI benefits are realized.

3. Rationale for the Study

Given its novelty in Algeria, EMI adoption has been under study from different angles. Accordingly, most of the literature available on EMI in Algeria tried to capture aspects like the sociopolitical background, the teachers' readiness, the institutional and systemic challenges, and students of specific fields of study (STEM fields mostly) attitudes. Therefore, the present study seeks to contribute to the body of literature—especially that is related to students' perceptions on EMI adoption—a broader examination in comparison to previous research. While most of the existing literature on Algerian students' views on EMI adoption are case studies that examined the views of students of specific departments, this study draws on a more diverse and representative sample, involving students from various Algerian universities, academic levels, and fields of study. This methodological range attempts to provide a more comprehensive and representative understanding of students' perceptions regarding EMI as a national policy.

Through the thematic analysis of students' opinions, attitudes, and recommendations, this study aims to adopt an inclusive approach to educational reform—one that values and incorporates the perspectives and expectations of students in shaping policy. Due to its multilingual nature, Algeria's language policy is deeply intertwined with historical, cultural, and political dimensions. Hence, decisions regarding EMI should be grounded in students' actual experiences in different linguistic and academic contexts. Valuing and taking into account student voices is of a paramount importance for making EMI implementation in Algerian higher education successful and effective.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore students' perceptions, opinions, and suggestions regarding the use of EMI in Algerian higher education. The researchers deliberately adopted a focused and concise design using one open-ended and one closed-ended questions to give participants space and freedom to express their views and suggest solutions. The rationale for minimizing the number of questions in the survey is to reach depth rather than breadth in understanding participants' authentic voices; in other words, gaining in-depth thematic insights rather than generalizable results. Additionally, using a single open-ended question aligns with the concept of Clean Language Interviewing (Grove and Panzer, 1989) which means reducing the unintentional influence of the interviewer language, such as introducing their own ideas, assumptions, leading questions, implied meanings, framing, or nonverbal cues like tone and gestures, that could affect the authenticity of the collected data (Tosey, 2015). Likewise, this study sought to gather participants' views without being guided or oriented by predefined survey items.

4.1. Participants

A total of 171 university students from 43 different Algerian universities, from multiple fields of study, and of different academic levels (LMD) were randomly recruited via the online platforms Facebook and Telegram using university student groups on both platforms. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The diversity in academic levels

(License: 34%, Master: 38%, Doctorate: 28%) and institutions (43 universities across Algeria) provided a range of perspectives on the implementation of EMI in Algerian higher education.

4.2. Data collection

Data were collected via a Google Forms questionnaire comprising an open-ended question: "What is your opinion and recommendation/suggestion on the use of EMI in Algerian higher education?", and a closed-ended question: "What language do you prefer as a medium of instruction in Algerian higher education?". Two more demographic questions were included, namely academic level and university affiliation, to contextualize the results. The data collection continued for a period of three months in which 171 valid responses were received. The responses were in Arabic, English, and French, which reflects the multilingual nature of Algerian higher education.

4.3. Data analysis

Given the qualitative nature of the study, the responses to the open-ended question were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis. Furthermore, descriptive analysis was used to explore students' preferences regarding which medium of instruction is to be better used in Algerian higher education.

The thematic analysis followed these six phases:

1. Familiarization with the data: responses were carefully read multiple times to capture general orientations among students' perspectives. No translations were done in this phase.
2. Generating initial codes: key portions in responses were highlighted, then initial codes were generated to describe the content of these highlighted portions. Special attention was paid to the repeating ideas and expressions across responses to indicate frequency. The generated codes were all in English to keep consistency in the analysis process. The coding was conducted iteratively, with continuous comparison across data sets to ensure internal coherence.
3. Generating themes: the generated codes were gathered under grouping themes based on conceptual subordination. Some codes were redefined as themes and other codes were integrated under them. While the coding was primarily carried out by the researcher, the process was supported by repeated cross-checking of codes and themes with the quantitative findings to enhance consistency and reduce subjectivity.
4. Reviewing themes: themes were checked and rechecked to assess whether they accurately and relevantly represent the data and are directly related to the research question.
5. Defining and naming themes: after reviewing the themes, the final themes were clearly defined and named to essentially reflect each thematic pattern.
6. Creating the report: final analysis occurred through explaining the themes and exemplifying through direct quotes from the datasets to support each theme.

The thematic analysis process was done manually without the use of qualitative data analysis software to maintain close interaction with the data.

As for the closed-ended question, concerning medium of instruction language preferences, data were analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages. The results represented an overview of students' language preferences to complement the

qualitative findings and offer contextual background to participants' opinions and suggestions.

Given the qualitative nature of the study, researcher bias was a potential limitation. To mitigate this, several strategies were employed. First, transparency was maintained by clearly documenting each stage of coding and theme development. Second, triangulation was applied by comparing open-ended responses with the closed-ended question results, which provided converging evidence and strengthened the validity of the findings. Finally, to ensure objectivity, reflexivity was maintained throughout the analysis process. This involved continuous awareness of potential researcher assumptions regarding language policy in Algeria and deliberate efforts to prevent these from influencing the interpretation of students' responses. In this way, the coding and thematic development remained firmly grounded in the data rather than in subjective perspectives.

4.4. Results and Discussion

The thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, revealed six main themes from 171 open-ended students' responses. These themes are discussed below and supported with direct quotes from students' responses (the quotes are delivered in their original language and followed with a translation when the original quote is not in English).

4.4.1. EMI and Global Opportunities

Across students' responses, their positive stance towards EMI was mostly justified by the benefits it provides on a global scale. Most of the responses mentioned that the status of English as a "world language" makes EMI adoption in Algerian higher education a necessity, rather than a choice.

"اللغة الانجليزية لغة عالمية يستخدمها اغلب دول العالم تسمح بالتواصل مع عدد اكبر من الثقافات وبالتالي يمكن تنويع مصادر البحث العلمي"

"English is a global language used by most countries around the world. It facilitates communication with a broader range of cultures, thereby allowing for greater diversity in academic research sources."

"العالم اليوم ناطق باللغة الانجليزية و مسايرة العالم تلزم علينا بناء جيل متمكن في اللغة الإنجليزية"

"Today's world is predominantly English-speaking, and keeping pace with global developments requires building a generation proficient in the English language."

"Using English is a need. I studied the bachelor's and master's levels in French. When I reached the doctorate stage, I faced many problems, as all types of research available in English only, and even the working language is English."

Moreover, several responses highlighted the role of EMI in international inclusion, specifically through enhancing access to information and bibliography.

"Pour les étudiants des filière scientifiques ; ils trouvent les articles et toutes les informations qu'ils ont besoin en anglais."

"For students in scientific fields, most articles and information they need are available in English."

One more role of EMI stated by students was providing the opportunity to join the global job market. Students focused on the idea that studying in the "world language" will enhance their chances to work abroad.

"استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية في التدريس في الجامعة له جوانب ايجابية كثيرة. باللغة الإنجليزية، يمكن للطلاب الاستفادة من مصادر تعليمية عالمية وتحسين فرصهم في سوق العمل العالمي."

"The use of English as a medium of instruction in university education offers numerous advantages. Through English, students can access global educational resources and enhance their prospects in the international job market."

Furthermore, from students' responses, it was elicited that they acknowledge the importance of EMI on a global scale not only from a personal perspective but also from a national perspective. Several students focused on the idea of how EMI adoption can enhance Algerian universities reputation and even attract international students.

"English needs to be integrated to the higher education system in Algeria because it helps in globalizing Algeria and helps attract foreign students."

"Adopting English as a medium of instruction ameliorates the international reputation of the Algerian university."

In sum, these views indicate that students recognize EMI as a facilitating means that helps students and institutions to join the global academic sphere. This acknowledgment of EMI and global opportunities aligns with what was found in literature on the advantages of EMI adoption on a global scale (Dearden, 2014; Piller and Cho, 2013; Kirkpatrick, 2016; Saidani and Afkir, 2023; Chaoua, 2023; Benassou and Bourenane, 2022).

4.4.2. Language Attitudes and Motivation

A highly shared opinion among students was their positive attitude towards English as a language. They affectively expressed their preference of English, especially compared to French, even when some of them admitted they lack English proficiency. Also, several students mentioned the idea that the new generation tend to prefer English.

"I think that the current Algerian generation have a preference for the English language."

"C'est une langue universelle, donc c'est bien de l'ajouter ici en Algérie comme une langue d'enseignement. Et j'ai remarqué que la nouvelle génération préfère la langue anglaise."

"English is a universal language, so it would be beneficial to adopt it as a medium of instruction in Algeria. I have also observed that the younger generation tends to prefer English."

They further justified their positive attitude by the ease of learning English very often compared to French.

"اللغة الإنجليزية لغة عالمية و بسيطة ، التدريس بها اسهل من اللغات الاخرى"

"English is a global and simple language, teaching through it is easier than using other languages."

"I believe that the adoption of the English language in higher education remains better than using French. English is relatively easier than French and opens up more opportunities abroad."

"L'anglais est très facile par rapport au Français."

"English is much easier than French."

Previous studies such as Ghanmi's (2019) indicated the idea of Algeria's younger generation preference of English, which aligns with what was recurrently mentioned in students' responses. However, the additional linguistic reason that leads students to desire replacing French with English (viewing English as easier to learn compared to French) was not encountered in the reviewed literature.

Overall, three main trends were elicited among students' language attitudes and the motives behind them. First, a group of students totally embraced English and viewed EMI adoption as a positive step toward academic global engagement. Second, a group of students resisted this shift and called for a shift to the mother tongue Arabic, supporting this

with the identity belonging and the ease of comprehension. Some students from this group even attribute their low academic attainment to the reliance on languages other than Arabic.

"انا على يقين لو كانت الدراسة باللغة العربية لتحصلنا على اعلى المراتب فالجامعة خصوصاً التخصصات العلمية لانني كنت افهم بشكل جيد واتحصل على علامات ومراتب جيدة جدا من الطور الابتدائي الى الطور الثانوي."

"I am confident that if instruction were delivered in Arabic, we would achieve higher academic performance at the university level, particularly in scientific disciplines. Personally, I had a strong understanding of the material and consistently achieved high grades and rankings from primary to secondary education."

Third, a group of students adopted a balanced perspective with a positive attitude toward English accompanied with a proud attitude toward their mother tongue Arabic. They consistently acknowledged the need to underscoring English status in Algerian higher education, but without neglecting or erasing the presence of Arabic.

"انتهاج اللغة الانجليزية في التدريس ستزيد من مستوى التعليم الجامعي وتسمح للطلاب بالتفتح نحو افكار جديدة في المعرفة في مجال البحث خاصة وان اللغة الانجليزية هي اللغة العالمية الاولى، لكن تبقى اللغة العربية لغة القرآن هي لغة الأم و نعتز بها"

"Adopting EMI will enhance the quality of higher education and allow students to open up to new ideas and knowledge in the field of research, especially given that English is the world's primary global language. However, Arabic – the language of the Qur'an – remains the mother tongue, and we take pride in it."

Not surprisingly, the three groups agreed on the need to remove French from the Algerian higher education, often citing the "colonizer language" label, and sometimes arguing that French lacks the unique status of English, making it less beneficial.

The move away from French expressed in students' responses align with what has recurrently been stated throughout a number of studies done in different contexts in Algerian higher education (Benassou and Bourenane, 2022).

4.4.3. Challenges to EMI implementation

Despite its advantages, students stated a number of challenges posed by EMI adoption in the Algerian higher education setting. The challenges varied between linguistic, pedagogical, and sociocultural and psychological challenges.

First, students highly reported the linguistic issue accompanied with EMI adoption concerning the lack of English proficiency among both students and teachers, making it difficult to explain and understand content.

"يقال أن فاقد الشيء لا يعطيه، و الاساتذة فاقدين للغة الانجليزية فلا يمكنهم ان يعطوها للطلبة"

"It is often said that one cannot give what one does not possess; since instructors lack proficiency in English, they are unable to effectively transmit it to their students."

"استعمال اللغة الانجليزية للتدريس خطوة ايجابية لكن مع ذلك، يجب أن نفكر أيضاً في تحديات اللغة التي قد تواجه الطلاب الذين ليسوا متحدثين بطلاقة بها."

"The use of English as a medium of instruction is a positive step; however, it is also essential to consider the linguistic challenges that may arise for students who are not fluent speakers."

Second, the pedagogical issues stated in students' responses included the sudden shift from French and Arabic to English without strategic planning or preparation is a barrier for EMI success. Additionally, the lack of serious training programs for both teachers and students was also a recurrently reported issue by students.

"اقرار استعمال لغة بعيدة عن ثقافتنا و ممارساتنا اليومية - بحكم استعمار فرنسا للجزائر لازيد من قرن و نصف- ثم التغيير المفاجئ و فرض لغة أجنبية جديدة في وقت يواجه الطلبة حالياً مشكلة حتى في اللغة العربية انتحار."

"The decision of using a language that is distant from our culture and everyday practices – already heavily influenced by French due to over a century and a half of colonization – followed by a sudden shift to a new foreign language at a time when students are already struggling even with Arabic, is a form of suicide."

"لا بد من اعادة وضع برنامج مسطر من قبل لجان احترافية مختصة في المجال هذا قصد النهوض بالجامعة الجزائرية و الطالب الجزائري"

"It is essential to redesign a structured program developed by professional committees specialized in this field, with the aim of advancing the Algerian university system and supporting the academic development of Algerian students."

"إذا تم فتح تكوينات مجانية جدية لكافة الطلبة على مستوى كافة جامعات فإستعمالها كوسيلة لتدريس أمر جيد"

"If serious and free training programs are made available to all students across all universities, then using English as a medium of instruction would be a positive step."

"si vous utilisez l'anglais comme moyen d'enseignement, il est avant tout nécessaire que les professeurs l'étudient d'une manière scientifique compatible avec la spécialisation de chacun, ce qui sera certainement difficile, compte tenu du temps long pour l'apprendre et aussi du faible niveau de certains d'entre eux."

"If English is to be used as a medium of instruction, it is first and foremost necessary for teachers to study it in a scientific manner that aligns with their respective specializations. This, however, will undoubtedly be challenging due to the extended time required to master the language and the low proficiency levels of some instructors."

Third, the sociocultural challenges encompass the concern of marginalizing mother tongue language, in addition to the concern of EMI usefulness practicality in professional future within local job market, especially that sectors are still dominated by French. As for the psychological challenges, students mentioned the anxiety they experience due to the pressure of managing learning the content and the language.

"يجب الاهتمام باللغة العربية لأنها لغة قران واللغة الرسمية للدولة الجزائرية واللغة التي مات من أجلها الشهداء. شعب الجزائر مسلم وإلى العروبة ينتسب. اللغة الانجليزية ستلتهم العربية ونصير في العولمة وتضيع هويتنا"

"Attention must be given to the Arabic language, as it is the language of the Qur'an, the official language of the Algerian state, and the language for which martyrs gave their lives. The Algerian people are Muslim and culturally affiliated with Arab identity. There is concern that the dominance of English may marginalize Arabic, accelerate cultural globalization, and ultimately lead to the erosion of national identity."

"L'anglais est une langue qui n'existe pas dans le marché du travail algériens, la majorité des sociétés exercent en français."

"English language does not exist in the Algerian job market, as the majority of companies operate in French."

"من الظلم ان يتم تدريسنا بها ونحن بهذا المستوى هل نذهب لتعلمها ونبدأ الدراسة ام نواجهها مع الضغط ومحاولة الترجمة ليس عدل برائي"

"It is unfair to be taught in English while we lack proficiency. Should we learn it then start studying or face it under the pressure of both and trying to translate? This is not fair in my opinion."

The linguistic, pedagogical, sociocultural and psychological challenges EMI faces align with what have been reported in previous studies (Benrabah, 2014; Ouarniki, 2023; Ghouali and Haddam Bouabdallah, 2024). Nevertheless, the economic and professional relevance of EMI in Algerian job market presents a key challenge that was overlooked in the reviewed literature. Several students' responses stressed this challenge, which reflects a

practical concern that might not be highlighted only by the stakeholders who experience it in reality i.e. students.

4.4.4. EMI as a top-down political decision

Students' perceptions did not solely include linguistic and educational dimensions of EMI, but included their ideas on the political dimension also. A proportion of students' responses directly judge EMI adoption in Algeria as a political decision made for political reasons. Some students further went to blame the ministry for not consulting them and just suddenly put them in the situation of learning in a new language, which led them to think that EMI adoption in Algeria is a top-down decision improvised without serious preparation.

"أرى أننا أصبحنا مصنع تجارب لأي وزير يأتي ليطبق أفكاره دون استشارة أحد لا من اهل الاختصاص ولا من نخبة المجتمع الأساتذة و الطلبة الجامعيين. وحتى النخبة التي في مناصب المسؤولية لا تناقش او تنتقد بل تطبق مباشرة بدون أي تفكير ثم يوضع الطلبة في الامر الواقع ويتحملون المعاناة"

"I see that we have become a testing ground for any minister who comes to implement his ideas without consulting anyone, neither specialists nor the elite of society, such as professors and university students. Even the elite who hold positions of responsibility do not discuss or criticize, but rather implement without questioning. Then the students are placed in the reality of the situation and endure the suffering."

The idea encompassed in students' views was presented in critical language policy literature (Benrabah, 2014; R'boul, 2022; Ntombela, 2023); however, it wasn't mentioned in the reviewed literature by students themselves as stakeholders whose voices need to be taken into consideration.

4.4.5. Identity preservation concerns

A respectively high number of students highlighted their concerns on the impact of EMI on identity, and how EMI will affect students on the long run. Moreover, some responses focused on the idea of the mother tongue pride and how Arabic should be valued more than any other language because it represents the Islamic and Arabic belongings.

"التركيز على اللغة الانجليزية اولا انتقاص من اللغة الام وثانيا هوية الطالب في نهاية المطاف ستكون مهزوزة. هناك الكثير من الدول التي لغتها ميتة ومع ذلك لم تفرط فيها بل تعتبرها اساس اي تقدم طبعا مع البحث في لغات أخرى".

"Focusing on English, firstly, constitutes a form of devaluation of the mother tongue, and secondly, it risks destabilizing the student's identity in the long term. There are many countries whose languages are considered 'dead', yet they have not abandoned them; rather, they regard them as the foundation of any form of progress, while also exploring other languages."

"يجب الاهتمام باللغة العربية لانها لغة قران واللغة الرسمية للدولة الجزائرية واللغة التي مات من اجلها الشهداء. شعب الجزائر مسلم والى العروبة ينتسب. اللغة الانجليزية ستلتهم العربية ونصهر في العولمة وتضيع هويتنا"

"Attention must be given to the Arabic language, as it is the language of the Qur'an, the official language of the Algerian state, and the language for which martyrs gave their lives. The Algerian people are Muslim and culturally affiliated with Arab identity. There is concern that the dominance of English may marginalize Arabic, accelerate cultural globalization, and ultimately lead to the erosion of national identity."

Some other students went beyond that to describe replacing French with English by replacing a colonizer language with another colonizer language.

"الانتقال من لغة مستعمر الى لغة مستعمر ثاني (مع اختلاف التقنيات) لا يعد انجاز! أفضل أن يغير التدريس الى لغة عربية مع توسيع نطاق و حركة الترجمة العلمية من و الى العربية"

"The shift from the language of one colonizer to that of another (albeit with different tools) is not an achievement. I would prefer that instruction be conducted in Arabic, accompanied by an expansion of scientific translation to and from Arabic."

These views were overlooked or neglected in the reviewed studies done in Algerian contexts; however, it aligns with critical language policy literature that categorizes EMI as a form of imperialism of the global north over the global south (Ntombela, 2023; R'boul, 2022).

4.4.6. Students' recommendations for EMI success

Students' perspectives on EMI use were divergent, reflecting a collective understanding of the diverse factors and circumstances featuring this policy implementation in Algerian higher education. Eventually, students' deep understanding of the topic permitted them to provide constructive suggestions aiming to improve EMI implementation. These suggestions mirror their desire to make EMI work rather than rejecting it.

First, a key and recurring recommendation was the call for a gradual implementation of EMI preceded with strategic planning. According to students, the preparation for EMI implementation should start earlier in the educational system starting with primary, middle, then secondary schools. Stated differently, they believe that we cannot separate university from earlier stages of educational system; accordingly, any issue that exist in the early phases will continue to the university. Hence, in order to have university students with good English proficiency, we need to enhance and underscore teaching it from primary school.

"أقترح إدراجها كلفة تدريس بالتدريج على المدى البعيد."

"I suggest introducing it as a medium of instruction gradually over the long term."

"استعمال اللغة الإنجليزية في الوقت الحالي ليس بالأمر المعقول. ربما سيتم تطبيقها تدريجيا مع الجيل الصاعد الذي بدأ تلقي اللغة الإنجليزية من المدرسة الابتدائية ويأخذون تكوينا جيدا فاللغة الإنجليزية على مر المراحل الدراسية فسيكونون على استعداد لتلقي الدراسة باللغة الإنجليزية في الجامعة ويكون الأساتذة أيضا قد أتقنوا جيدا اللغة الإنجليزية من التكوين الذي تقدمه لهم الجامعة في اللغة الإنجليزية."

"The use of English at the present time is not a reasonable option. It can be implemented gradually with the upcoming generation, who have begun learning English from primary school and will receive solid training in the language throughout their educational journey. By the time they reach university, they will be prepared to pursue their studies in English, and university instructors will also have acquired strong proficiency in English through the training provided to them by the university."

Second, a necessary recommendation that was highly suggested by students is a serious training program for teachers first then students. Some students also emphasized the specificity of English at which scientific fields teachers need to be trained, so they efficiently deliver content information. Additionally, some students suggested new approaches of training other than the classic training by offering teachers and students with short-term internships in anglophone countries to acquire the language.

"يجب ادراج حصة ESP اي اللغة الانجليزية الخاصة بكل تخصص وحتى تكوين الأساتذة والطلبة يجب أن يكون متخصصا حيث انه هناك مفردات ولغة مختلفة من تخصص لآخر فاحتياجات طالب الطب مثلا اللغة الانجليزية تختلف عن احتياجات طالب الهندسة او المحاماة"

"There should be a dedicated ESP (English for Specific Purposes) course tailored to each academic discipline, and the training provided to both instructors and students should be specialized, as the vocabulary and language use vary significantly from one field to another. For instance, the English language needs of a medical student differ from those of an engineering or law student."

A Focused Inquiry into Algerian Students' Voices on English as a Medium of Instruction Adoption in Higher Education

"يجب تقديم دروس دعم وتكوين للطلبة الجامعيين في اللغة الإنجليزية على يد أساتذة مؤهلين بدءاً من الحروف والجمل حتى يتم إتقان اللغة بشكل كامل وكذلك تعزيز التعاون مع الجامعات الأجنبية خاصة البريطانية والأمريكية في هذا المجال و اعتماد نظام طلاب التبادل الأجنبي."

"Supportive lessons and training should be provided to university students in English by qualified instructors, starting from letters and sentences, until full proficiency in the language is achieved. Additionally, collaboration with foreign universities, particularly those in the UK and the USA, should be enhanced in this area, and the foreign exchange student system should be adopted."

Third, the challenges of the lack of proficiency and concerns about identity preservation were addressed with the suggestion of a bilingual educational system in Algerian higher education comprising Arabic that reflects the national identity and English that reflects the global engagement.

"It is better to use bilingualism in university education, English and Arabic."

"We must build an educational system based on only two languages...our mother tongue (Arabic) and the world language (English)."

The thematic analysis of students' responses resulted in the above discussed themes. The themes flow logically from 1) why EMI is supported: 1st and 2nd themes, 2) what is making it difficult or problematic: 3rd, 4th, and 5th themes, and 3) how it might be improved: 6th theme.

The descriptive analysis findings for the closed-ended question: "what language do you prefer as a medium of instruction in Algerian higher education?" are presented in the following table and pie chart:

Language medium of instruction preference	English	Arabic	French	English and Arabic
Frequency	82	61	11	17
Percentage	48%	36%	6%	10%

Table 01. Distribution of Student Responses to the Preferred Language of Instruction

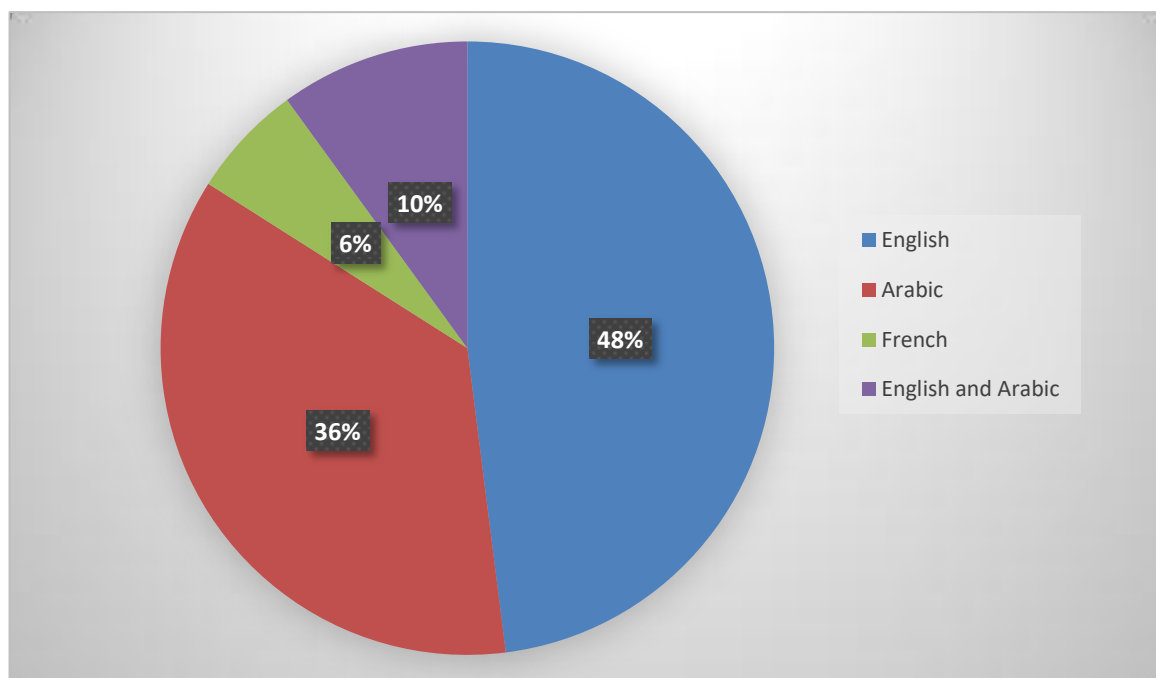


Figure 01. Visual Representation of Students' preferred language of instruction in Algerian higher education

The open-ended question sought to explore students' perceptions regarding EMI adoption, and reached rich and deep insights into students understanding of the topic and its factors and circumstances. The closed-ended question, on the other hand, was intended to provide an accurate and quantifiable overview of orientations in students preferences, and to identify dominant preferences towards the medium of instruction in Algerian higher education across the sample.

After a close interaction with the data from students' open-ended responses, it was clear that students were divided into two major groups: one group calling for higher education modernization through the adoption of EMI, stressing its global benefits; the other expressing a strong attachment to the Arabic language as a representation of identity and religious belonging. Additionally, a notable proportion of students proposed bilingualism (English and Arabic) as a suitable and practical solution, which allows for a balanced approach, combining higher education global engagement and treatment of comprehension and identity preservation concerns.

These qualitative patterns were clearly mirrored in the quantitative findings, where English was the most preferred language (48%), followed by Arabic (36%), with 10% favoring a bilingual approach, and only 6% selecting French. This last shows a shift away from French's historical dominance, which aligned with the minimal support it received in open-ended responses.

The consistency between qualitative and quantitative data ensures the validity of students expressed opinions, and emphasizes the thoughtful and context-aware perspectives they hold about language policy in Algerian higher education.

Conclusion

In the present study, after a thorough literature review on EMI adoption first in global and regional contexts then in the Algerian context, researchers sought to examine Algerian university students' perceptions on the recently adopted policy of using EMI in higher education through a focused inquiry on a diverse national sample. The thematic analysis of students' qualitative data was resulted in six main themes combining views of ambition to effectively join the global academic community and concerns related to areas such as academic attainment and identity preservation.

The results highlighted that students' views were split between perceiving EMI as a positive step towards global inclusion and critics on the sudden way it is being introduced. Students further stated issues related to lack of strategic preparation, insufficient training programs for both students and teachers, and the lack of linguistic and pedagogical support. Their responses also stressed that the top-down political approach followed in EMI adoption in Algeria neglects the complicated nature of the sociolinguistic Algerian university context and the issues experienced by students in their actual academic experiences.

These findings carry important implications for EMI policy and practice in Algeria. First, the need for a more inclusive education reform approach that integrates students' voices into the planning and implementation of language policies. Second, the necessity for a gradual yet flexible approach to EMI implementation, which underscores efficient training for teachers and

students, and provides bilingual materials to enhance comprehension and teacher-student communication at least during the transition phase. Finally, the need to deal with Arabic presence in academic spaces not just as a language but as a marker of identity and religious belonging, which ensures eliminating identity-related concerns. Valuing and responding to students' voices is of a paramount importance not only for the rightness of the policy but also for guaranteeing its success and effectiveness.

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